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UNCLAS VIENNA 003232

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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [AU](#) [OPRC](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: November 03, 2006

Meeting of the Party Leaders

11. The "secret" meeting between the leaders of the OeVP and the SPOe, which occasioned much speculation in Austria's media yesterday, in fact took place with President Heinz Fischer on Wednesday. The talks were aimed at ending the stalemate in the two parties' negotiations to form a new coalition government. Despite the meeting, Austria media agree that the coalition talks remain in limbo.

It was the first meeting between SPOe chairperson Alfred Gusenbauer and OeVP leader Wolfgang Schuessel since the OeVP suspended negotiations in anger over SPOe support for parliamentary investigations into the deal for Austria to purchase 18 Eurofighter jets and recent scandals involving Austrian banks, most notably Bawag, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says. All Austrian media welcome the fact that the two parties seem to be "talking to each other again," but they remain pessimistic about a quick resumption of coalition talks. The atmosphere remains "chilly," and it is unclear if and when negotiations could continue, the mass-circulation daily Kurier states. The OeVP has also accused the SPOe of not negotiating in good faith. Some in the OeVP believe the SPOe wants to form a minority coalition government with the Greens, with the tacit support of the FPOe, instead of a SPOe-OeVP grand coalition. OeVP floor leader Wilhelm Molterer said yesterday his party will not allow itself to be "boxed and badgered" into a coalition with the SPOe, and demanded the Social Democrats issue a public statement that it has no interest in forming a coalition with the Greens and the FPOe. Meanwhile, SPOe floor leader Josef Cap has denied that his party is aiming for a coalition with the Greens and FPOe. Cap also speculated the Conservatives are planning to cite a lack of cooperation with the SPOe as a reason to seek new elections, the Wiener Zeitung writes.

EU & Russia Preparing Summit

12. In Brussels, the European Union and Russia are looking to settle differences over future cooperation. The current partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Russia expires at the end of next year.

ORF online news reports that Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja as the current EU Council President, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov intend to prepare a summit meeting to be held in Helsinki November 24. This is necessary because several issues for a potential new cooperation agreement remain unresolved. There has been no agreement yet between the EU and Russia on topics including human rights or the EU's push for Russia to sign an energy charter, which would not only guarantee

the EU's long-term energy supplies from Russia, but also facilitate EU investment in Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin refused concessions on energy at the Lahti summit last month. Thus the issue of energy supplies is likely to be a hot topic also during the German EU Presidency in 2007, ORF online news believes.

Despite Kerry: Iraq Remains Top Issue

13. While the row over remarks about US troops made by former presidential candidate John Kerry is dying down after Kerry apologized for his statements, the situation in Iraq remains on top of the agenda in the US mid-term campaign, surveys reveal. A scathing assessment of the situation in the Gulf state by the US military has been circulated in the US media recently. In its series of reports on the upcoming Congressional elections, liberal daily Der Standard argues that despite former presidential candidate John Kerry's "poorly started joke" on US troops, Iraq remains a top issue on the campaign agenda. Still, the daily says, Kerry has done the Republicans "a huge favor with his glitch," and has relegated a lot of negative new reports, particularly on Iraq, to the backburner -- at least for the moment. However, according to a recent Times/CBS poll, Iraq remains the key issue for Americans: Almost 70 percent believe their president does not have a plan for how to end the war there, and 80 percent say that President Bush - with his new, candid approach, has merely changed his rhetoric, but not his strategy, the Standard writes.

The Fear of Mexifornia

14. Foreign affairs writer Christoph Winder is publishing a series of analyses of the US Congressional election campaign and key issues on the agenda. Among the hot topics is immigration, which some election campaigners appear to be using to further their own political agenda -- Republican Pat Buchanan, for example, who recently published a book warning about the "third world invasion and conquest of America."

Foreign affairs writer for liberal daily Der Standard Christoph Winder argues that Republican Patrick Buchanan, who published a book entitled "State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America" recently, is pushing an anti-immigration agenda, and predicts -- as Winder puts it -- the "imminent demise of the US empire." Buchanan is warning that "hordes of immigrants pouring into the US are not only spreading disease and crime, but are also destroying the American way of life on a grand scale," Winder says. By 2050, Buchanan suggests, "California will have gone back to Mexico." Even now, California had reverted to a "third-world state," and had become "Mexifornia," says Buchanan. This, the Republican believes, is "no coincidence, it is the result of a political master plan on the part of Mexico, which had never forgiven the Americans for having lost Texas to them in the 19th century." Out of "resentment, they are now pushing a clandestine re-conquest of North America," Winder quotes Buchanan.

While the Republican's views can still be seen as extravagant, even in an election year as 2006, they show that "apparently the classic immigration country USA is facing yet another one of its periodically emerging immigration crises," writes Winder.

For full text in German go to:

<http://derstandard.at/> --> Politik --> International --> USA --> "Die grosse Angst vor Mexifornia"

Interview on Afghanistan

15. In an interview with an Austrian daily, UN coordinator for Afghanistan Tom Koenigs discussed the Taliban's "renaissance" in Afghanistan, and the question of whether Pakistan is supporting Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

In an interview, Tom Koenigs, special envoy for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, told centrist daily Die Presse developments in Afghanistan may be a result of the fact that the "regeneration of the Taliban has been neglected, on the one hand. On the other hand, we have failed to sufficiently recognize the basis of the Taliban's success. Essentially, we've left the country to its own devices." Nonetheless, he sees some success in Afghanistan: "The country used to be an area where terrorists could move and regroup freely. That is no longer the case. Furthermore, the country now has

a constitution, a democratically-elected parliament, and a democratically-elected president. There are many development projects. Per-capita income in Afghanistan has doubled since 2001." Asked whether Pakistan was supporting Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Koenigs said: "That is the million-Euro question. I don't know. You can hide in the border region, (...) but to assume the Pakistani state is protecting bin Laden would be taking things too far. After all, Pakistan has captured a number of al-Qaeda leaders." The problem, he suspects, is that Pakistan is "not making a clear distinction between al Qaeda and the Taliban, who many believe to be the lesser evil, or even politically acceptable."

Kilner